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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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SOUTH AFRICA: The Role of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi

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Summary

Chief Gatsha Buthelezi is the undisputed leader of six million Zulus, the most numerous black tribal group in South Africa, and President of Inkatha, the largest black political movement in the country. Although critical of South Africa's new constitution, which grants limited political rights to Coloreds and Indians but has denied the country's 24 million blacks any political role, Buthelezi has remained faithful to a policy of negotiation and conciliation with the government of President P.W. Botha.

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Based on US Embassy reporting and our own assessment, we expect that during Buthelezi's meeting with President Reagan, he probably will express his support for US policy towards South Africa but note that Washington's backing of the new South Africa constitution last year badly weakened his position and that of other moderates. Buthelezi almost certainly

This memorandum was prepared for Phillip Ringdahl, the Director, African Affairs, National Security Council. It was written by [redacted] of the Office of African and Latin American analysis, with a contribution from [redacted] of the Office of Central Reference. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Regional Issues Branch, Africa Division, ALA, on [redacted]

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will encourage greater US pressure on Pretoria to change its policies of racial separation. He may also voice appreciation for US support for black education as well as the US program of drought relief that has benefited Zulus in rural areas. As a recognized spokesman for black South Africans, Buthelezi met with Senator Robert Kennedy in 1966, President Nixon in 1973, President Carter in 1977, and Senator Edward Kennedy earlier this year.

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Buthelezi and Inkatha: The Man and his Movement

Buthelezi--who is 56--belongs to the royal family of the Zulu tribe. He received a bachelor's degree in history and Bantu (Native) Administration at Fort Hare University in South Africa, where he was a classmate of Zimbabwe Prime Minister Robert Mugabe. First as a student, and then as hereditary leader of the Zulu people, Buthelezi has been active in politics since the mid-1950s. He also played a bit part in a 1966 film about the Zulu War in which he portrayed his great-great-grandfather. He joined the African National Congress (ANC) at Fort Hare in the period just before Pretoria banned the black political organization. He has been Chief Minister of KwaZulu (Zululand) since 1970. Buthelezi won the support in the late 1970s of moderate Colored and Asian politicians and some white liberals who were attracted by his policies of negotiation and reconciliation.

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Buthelezi derives much of his authority in South African politics from his presidency of Inkatha, a Zulu cultural movement that was founded in 1928 but which remained largely dormant until he revived it in 1974. By the early 1980s, Buthelezi's movement had approximately 750,000 members with more than 2,000 chapters in every province and black homeland in South Africa, according to US Embassy and press reporting. We estimate, based on US Embassy as well as press and academic reporting, that the vast majority of its membership is Zulu. Inkatha bills itself as an antiapartheid movement seeking a multiracial national convention to determine the country's future. According to US Embassy reporting, Inkatha has an estimated annual budget of several million dollars and its own paramilitary force, which takes the form of a youth service corps that is trained in two camps in KwaZulu.

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Challengers to Buthelezi's Authority

Notwithstanding his position among Zulus, Buthelezi's role as a leader of black South Africans is increasingly challenged. According to US diplomatic and open source reporting, Buthelezi has long had poor relations with more radical black politicians who believe that Inkatha's near-exclusive Zulu orientation and cultural emphasis reinforce Pretoria's policies of racial separation and of playing up the tribal divisions among South African blacks. We believe that Buthelezi's image as a Zulu leader

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is the source of both his greatest strength and his greatest weakness because it reduces his popularity among non-Zulu blacks.

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Many black South Africans are angered by Buthelezi's intolerance of any criticism and by recent attacks by Buthelezi's supporters that have broken up political rallies by his opponents, according to reporting in the black South African press. Flashes between Inkatha and more radical students, which left several dead in 1983 and 1984, raised concerns about Inkatha's use of force and its tactics of intimidation.

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Buthelezi has also engaged in verbal firefights with a host of black leaders in recent years.

-- Buthelezi split with the African National Congress in the 1970s following a dispute over tactics. He has recently accused the ANC of plotting to assassinate him.

-- Buthelezi has little--if any--regard for Nobel laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu. In a recent letter to Tutu, Buthelezi castigated him for "playing to the galleries," noting that "as a Bishop of my church you should be playing a conciliatory role. You shame the cloth you wear and you turn the accolade you received in being given the Nobel Peace Prize into a farce."

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-- Buthelezi also has poor relations with the United Democratic Front, a coalition of non-white organizations that has widespread support among urban intellectuals and skilled workers. In a speech before the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly in May 1984, Buthelezi referred to the UDF as a "slimy stepping stone" established by the ANC to destroy Inkatha. UDF and Inkatha supporters are engaged in a battle for control of several black townships in the Durban area.

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Despite vociferous criticism from the ANC, the UDF, and independent leaders like Tutu, Buthelezi shows no sign of abandoning his positions as a black spokesman. During a student boycott of schools last year, Buthelezi was the only prominent black leader to condemn the violence in the black communities. According to US Embassy and press reporting, he told Senator Kennedy in Durban earlier this month that he would oppose any campaign for Western disinvestment as superficial, unworkable, and harmful to the black people of South Africa. Buthelezi's support for US southern Africa policy has been qualified by his strident criticism of our support for the new South African constitution.

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The View from Pretoria

The South African government has assiduously courted Chief Buthelezi since the early 1970s. Pretoria has unsuccessfully tried on several occasions to convince Buthelezi to have KwaZulu become an "independent"

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homeland like Ciskei, Transkei, Venda and Bophuthatswana, according to US Embassy reporting since the late 1970s. Frustrated by Buthelezi's opposition, Pretoria tried unsuccessfully in the 1970s to create an anti-Buthelezi movement among the Zulus.

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Having failed to coopt Inkatha, Pretoria now seems intent on coexisting with Buthelezi. President Botha met with Buthelezi earlier this month to discuss national issues, and we feel it likely that the South African government has decided--in the short run--not to challenge the Zulu leader.

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Prospects

Despite continuing tense relations with other black political leaders and movements that will limit his support outside Zulu ethnic areas, we believe that Buthelezi is still the single most powerful black leader in South Africa. We believe that he will maintain a course that allows him to work legally and forcefully against the apartheid system as a loyal South African. In a speech last spring in which he congratulated the government for its successful pact with Mozambique, he said: "Whether or not we are at peace with our neighbors, apartheid is doomed to fail and will remain under siege from internal democratic nonviolent black tactics."

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Buthelezi has no obvious successor as Zulu Chief Minister or President of Inkatha. Buthelezi's assassination or death [redacted] probably would spell the end of Inkatha's influence.

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South Africa: Black Homelands



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